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March 26, 2015

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Sen. Rodríguez statement regarding education vouchers debate in committee today

AUSTIN - Today the Senate Committee on Education heard SB 4, SB 276, and SB 642, bills that would essentially take money from public schools to fund private schools. State Sen. José Rodríguez issued the following statement:

The Legislative Budget Board (LBB) has previously estimated the loss in federal funds when a student leaves the public school system is \$1,000 per student. With roughly 200,000 students in District 29's 17 schools districts, that comes out to tens of millions of dollars for public education lost each year in just one corner of the state.

Meanwhile, this is still an experiment in education, and the early results, despite the rhetoric, are not promising when viewed through the rigorous accountability placed upon public schools. Research on voucher programs nationwide concludes that "vouchers have had no clear positive effect on student academic achievement, and mixed outcomes for students overall," just to quote one study.

When voucher dollars leave the public system, accountability disappears. Private schools are not required to comply with assessment and accountability standards as are public schools -- to include charters.

Schools receiving vouchers are not required to comply with state accountability evaluations, open record laws, or statewide academic standards. Private schools are not required to follow federal guidelines for serving students with special needs.

While I think charter schools can make sense under certain circumstances, I do not see the public value in the voucher "experiment." What this does is take our

eye off the ball and make it appear that we are making progress by doing something on education, when in fact public schools work and what they need is our bottom line support in the budget.

It's especially disappointing to have this discussion the day after the Senate passed huge tax breaks that don't benefit the majority of Texans, while the proposed budget still fails to restore the deep cuts made in 2011.

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Senate Hispanic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.